(2) 5% in the second year but not exceeding Rs. 8,830 per metric tonne.

(d) and (e) The Government takes a view on the matter of imposing safeguard duty after following certain laid down procedures and considering the interests of the domestic industry, the importers as well as user industry. The Standing Board on Safeguard has decided to impose a safeguard duty on the item acetylene black, after considering the matter from all possible angles.

Protests lodged by China

2327. SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that China has lodged protest over imposition of anti-dumping duties on its exports by India; and

(b) if so, what is Government's reaction in respect thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) The Government has received representations from Industry representatives of the People's Republic of China protesting imposition of anti-dumping duties recommended on imports of metallurigical coke originating in or exported from China.

Anti-dumping duties are imposed on the basis of the recommendations of the Designated Authority appointed under the Customs Tarrif Act and the Rules made thereunder. The procedure followed by the Designated Authority for recommending anti-dumping duties is quasi-judicial in nature. Due opportunities are provided to all interested parties, including the exporters from the subject countries, to defend their interests. Moreover, the orders passed by the the Designated Authority are appellable before the Central Excise & Gold Control (Appellate) Tribunal.

Patenting of Basmati Rice

2328. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:
SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some producers in the United States have been able to secure the patent for basmati rice outside the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof with the date from which the patent has been validated and the name of the country wherein this has happened;

(c) whether Government have taken up the issue with the W.T.O.;

(d) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for delay thereon, if any; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) A patent under the title "Basmati Rice Lines and grains" has been granted to Rice Tec. Inc. Alvin Texas on 2.9.97 by the Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, The United States of America. Government has no knowledge of the patent having been obtained in any other country.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) Patents are granted by respective Governments under their Patents laws. Whenever information is received about patents being taken on certain products which are of commercial interest to India and which in our views do not satisfy the criteria of patentability, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged. After sufficent material is gathered, a challenge petition is filed for re-examination and ultimate revocation of patent in that country.

(c) Export promotion meausres are continuously being taken by the Government through changes in policies and procedures for providing an export friendly environment, involvement of States in export promotion and consultation with trade and industry. A number of steps have been taken to promote exports which include lowering of interest rates on export credit, reduction in transation cost through decetralisation and simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions. The Government is according high priority to exports and all necessary steps are being taken to put exports on high growth trajectory.

Increase in Trade Deficit

2329. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the increase in country's trade deficit during April-August, 1998;

(b) the reasons for widening gap between exports and imports? and

(c) the details of measures taken by Government to increase exports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) As per the provisional data received from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCI & S), the trade deficit during April—August 1998-99 has increased to US$ 3871.5 million from US$ 2550.2 million during the same period last year.

(b) The widening of gap has been due both to a slowdown in export growth as well as an increase in imports especially that of gold and silver.

Post-Harvest Mango Care

2330. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether attention of the Government has been drawn to the news-items which appeared in the Economic Times, dated the 10th August, 1998 captioned "Low post-harvest care denies Indian mangoes shelf space on foreign markets";

(b) if so, what is the reaction of Government to the observations made therein and facts of the matter;

(c) the details of action taken/proposed to improve and up grade post-harvest care for mangoes to ensure substantial export; and

(d) the details of action plan formulated for the current year and 9th Plan for upgradation of post-harvest facilities for export of fruits?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The Government is aware of the inadequate post-harvest management practices in the horticulture sector which also has an impact on the exports. Some of the steps taken to improve the post-harvest management in horticultural sector and to enhance exports inter-alia, include:—

(i) Providing assistance for raising small and large nurseries for prodcution of good quality planting materal, upgradation of technical knowhow of farmers through demonstrations, trainings and publicity, rejuvenation of old orchards, area expansion, supply of minikits for vegetables, improving productivity and training of farmers under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Integrated Development of Tropical, Temperate and Arid Zone fruits;

(ii) Provision of soft loans for setting up of grading/processing centres, transport vehicles, precooling units,